

## ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis:

THUMP LIKE THEY SHOULD

Noah Siela, Master of Fine Arts, 2011

Directed By:  
English

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This collection of poems starts strange and ends strange. Strange, in this case, is not a pejorative. Rather, these poems try to capture a hunk of the creative mind at work when the impetus for expression is familiar and ultimately its own mechanism for repulsion. These poems sometimes are set in Baltimore, the rural community of childhood, or inside a marble. To these poems, the idiomatic and the colloquial are more relevant than the elevated. Language sets tone and acts as stabilizer in what is, hopefully, a divot-filled mindscape.

THUMP LIKE THEY SHOULD

by

Noah F. Siela

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**“You’re all a bunch of...you’re all a bunch of...you’re all a bunch of pieces of fuck!”-Sug Gehrig after losing a giant pot on an ace, two, three in a hand of Three-Card Fonda Guts up at The Haymarket, late winter of 1997. If you don’t double down, it’s the best hand you can get.**

***It is 12:10 in New York. In Houston it is 2 p.m. - From Ted Berrigan’s “Words for Love”***

## **The Will of Windows**

This beautiful woman in Albuquerque  
keeps sending me photos of herself  
with less and less clothes on.  
She's got a carburetor tattooed  
on her right elbow, something about  
heaven running the length of her torso.  
Ah, gazer, from behind these dirty windows  
in this public place  
it's so hard to keep casing A Promised Land.  
I'm in a psuedohumanistic state. I think.  
The will of the windows  
to block some noise, some light,  
that 3-way street hug on Cathedral  
as hot coffee stings a chipped molar.

### **Old Men Speaking of Narcissus**

Nothing is deader than this cafe  
with its old men speaking of Narcissus.  
I fear my ears  
because they make my conscience  
mellow black.  
Inside it, wild, blacker dogs  
lap water straight from pipes trickling.  
“In ’61,” one old man says,  
“a young idealist couldn’t pay to get to Africa.”  
With this, for whatever reason,  
I have something against myself  
and old malady comes:  
strangled mood, fist-drive of wrong-edged enthusiasm...

To pick steelware off this round table  
just to watch it rust forever.  
My hand, its skin creased around fork,  
a batwing over steel.  
In buzz of room, I get small,  
hailstone falling through lightning bolt,  
fucking up its jags.  
This cafe’s hum  
hums and black dogs go pipe to pipe,  
newest fangs tucked over driest lips,  
tongues groping at trickle,  
licking at grins wherever they drip.

## **Expensive Juice Instead of Coffee**

You'd think it'd be kind of thrilling  
to have a warm bag of St. Bernard shit  
in the pocket of your mid-length winter coat  
in the coffee shop. But it's not really.  
I just forgot about it being in there  
before I came here.

That's what it's like to be alive at 8:38 pm  
in the winter of 2011.

Peace on earth's skinny as a head hair  
and the soft core of womb-locked babies  
go hard as granite in their moms.

Today I thought about blood  
in all those thousands of miles of coaxial veins  
running the length, the height of this country,  
and I replaced blood with tar and we all sat there,  
listening to just the hum of sagging power lines,  
waiting for something dramatic to happen,  
like a hawk swooping down to steal  
the last slice of birthday cake from a toddler's plate,  
so we could drop our jaws in collective,  
trying to be more stunned than one another.



**“Dear Mom,**

It’s Jan. 20, 2011 in Baltimore,  
about lunch time I suppose.  
I’m looking for a room to not fight in.  
One where I can go crazy with dignity I suppose.  
I’m coming home.  
Go to that one place I grew up the best  
and drape the whole barn in a tarp  
made of tablecloths so it’s a surprise when I get there.

Don’t skimp on materials.  
I won’t tolerate the sight  
of exposed cornerstone or jutting weathervane  
when I pull into the driveway.  
That’s it for now. I love you  
and tell my brothers and sister the same.

Love,  
An Animal.”

### **At the Coffee Shop, an Old Man Puts Cream Cheese on a Bagel**

The old comes teetering in out of the rain  
wearing a fishing vest with so many pockets  
and everything hinges on the pronunciation of *epoch*.  
Lowell, I know you wanted it *ee-pok*,  
like the Brits would, but I pronounce it *ep-uhk*,  
and the old man sits a table over,  
his liver-spotted hand presses a plastic knife  
full of cream cheese into a toasted bagel.  
Two nights ago I fucked a white woman  
who said her ass was like a black woman's  
and I laughed in her face while she  
slipped a condom on me and today  
I can't kick a hangover, sitting like a knob of misplacement  
in this normalized room while coquettish chatter,  
removed as the jet stream, flows around me  
and I think I could be anywhere but here.  
I'm a body full of blood being pressed into small channels,  
doomed to spill in its organ-pushed aggression.  
It is murder to pity the old  
as he, again, presses the flimsy plastic knife  
into the gummy bread, takes what's left unused  
at the tip and wipes it onto a chunk  
of semi-burnt circumference.

### **Windy Day in Baltimore**

To see yourself change in things changing around you,  
becoming different self. I've lost guts for clamor today.  
Chipped cobblestone streets of Baltimore nip without tact  
like dogs of history. The neighbors who hardly listen  
to anything when I've walked the block  
happy and drunk or mumbling hungover  
blare songs from their places like chirping,  
fountain-wading birds hopping in fluid patterns of sun light.  
Because of the day's strong wind, overhanging business signs,  
thin-tinned and delicate, screech on rusted bars just meant to prop.

### **The Plot to Rocky 4 (on a theme by my friend Mark Leidner)**

So, it's Cold War USA and James Brown comes in on a float. Apollo, Rocky's good friend at this point, gets killed by Drago, a huge Russian, and Adrian (Rocky's wife), of course, is afraid. Rocky gets a sports car to think after funerals. He goes to Russia and Drago is from there. Drago gets injected and runs up hi-tech hills. Rocky climbs the Caucasus with a beard and yells Drago. Rocky takes a whoopin' and sustains. Drago gets cut early and you should never never fuck a woman you don't love. 10 rounds later Drago thinks The Stallion is iron and the Commies go Rocky Rocky Rocky. Drago gets beat and Rocky ends the Cold War. If I can change, you can change Rocky says. Oh, the soundtrack is so fucking good.

## **Day and its Poppings**

Today must be popping in the street, the springs  
of germinal things ejecting buds as if from little toasters.  
I put a foot out of bed and dip toes to find  
the mushy life of the cat coiled around the lamp  
post, oak-heavy and dusty. I have dominion  
over the room and I say, "Room, I have given  
you life!" But I am not uncommon I think  
as I plug my ears to hear the forsaken punching  
of my heart against its pen. How dumb to think  
myself the newest sub-apostle, my first decree to  
project life, the animation-giving  
tickling 2-week whiskers on their way past my lips.  
And look, now! sunbeams through odd-crimped mini-blinds cast  
themselves goofy, fling hoot owls hooting in staccato to the wall.

## **All Over the Creation of Adam**

I'd like to think all my poems are like that old woman, hunched and sleeping in the cafe, drooling into a bag of donut holes she brought in from Dunkin' Donuts. Instead, my poems are like the clothes of the farm I left 18 years ago.

If I put the blinking red light of my Blackberry into a poem, what's it become?

The more bored I am during the day, the farther I sprint into the living room after waking up from my heart attack nightmare.

I've squandered the love of a few women who let me fuck them to get over a hangover lately.

Today I'm so sad and that little sore spot on my ribs is hurting just enough that all I can do is stare out this window, relentless as the unsleeping shark.

I got published in this little Baltimore magazine last spring and read some of my poems for its release on December 17<sup>th</sup> and was drunk enough to almost cry when I got to the one about my dad.

Most people think a seagull carrying a plastic lid through a Target parking lot is cringeworthy, but I cringe different than them.

Pig farmers want cash money, not bacon or sympathy.

I imagine, if I die of something chronic, I'll have a few moments where I genuinely respect someone who's been horrible to me.

If someone reads this poem and recognizes me, they'll think about my dick when they see me because I've mentioned it here and that's how poems should work.

I wish I was physically strong and skilled enough to make a harpoon whiz past your ear.

If you get your hand stuck in one of those claw-drop games in a Denny's lobby, and the first thing that pops into your head is something like last year's tax return, don't ever write a poem.

Sometimes I'd like to pay for a shoeshine after extracting all the love from a room full of strangers.

I know you loved me when I pulled off your panties and dropped them carefully like I was trying to avoid small campfires burning all over your bedroom floor.

Your revenge is a cheese omelet; mine's a 7-layer dip.

Imagine if you were suicidal and the pope let you get on the scaffolding and put a .357 Magnum under your chin and spray that last thought of *trigger finger* all over the Creation of Adam.

### **Hangover Brain**

The shards of green glass  
being pushed down the alley  
by today's rain is sickening  
as harbinger to me being vehicled,  
with a hangover, swept away to a meal  
on the other side of town, to small talk.

Bullshit I say, but I go when summoned.

The moving brain, in its sturdy house of bone,  
treats every synapse as if the gap,  
which was, only a day ago,  
just the yard-wide ease of a puddle hop  
to keep a set of feet dry ,  
is now thick with thorns,  
long, only bridgeable  
by bottle rocket skips  
across sets of gangplanks.  
Since nothing is capable today,  
everything is revolutionary:  
the rain, those shards shattered  
but now reassembling differently  
and stuck mid-alley on a clear plastic bottle,  
end-crushed by car tire,  
flailing up at its still-capped end.

## **The Higgs Boson**

Tony, on shore leave once,  
drunk and coked up,  
fucked a girl who probably loved him  
in the backseat of a southbound Datsun  
before handing her off to some other sailors.  
But eventually he found salvation  
and now sends emails  
about the inadequacies  
of a state school's basketball coach,  
praying for him to endure  
the wrath of its unhappy fan base.  
P.S. he types in bold letters,  
Thank God for Jesus.

His wife, ten years younger,  
former sweetheart of Pete,  
Tony's younger half-brother, was stolen  
by Tony incrementally,  
turning Pete to a life of physics.  
And from the Hadron Collider  
at the Franco-Swiss border,  
Pete sends postcards asking  
if anyone would like to see  
a tractor pull somewhere  
in the middle of Nebraska  
in late spring or early summer.

Liveable Edens, like a cancer  
that's eaten a badder cancer,  
they've both arrived at, each version  
dense with fruit, with snakes,  
with forbidden particles  
ignored so long  
that when they sometimes collide  
over their heads, exploding outward,  
sending sprung shards of charged light  
past each garden's shrub line  
toward some other grove



of divined shifting,  
they don't even watch anymore.

### **My Father's Garage**

Everything was sharp in his garage,  
hung from sturdy hooks or bent nails  
set deep in low ceiling joists,  
corn knives lurched from leather straps,  
hunting forgetting heads in poor light,  
disc blades dangled from linked zip ties,  
swayed dangerous in mildewed air,  
clinked together like glanced cymbals  
when door-slammed wind moved through the room.  
Even the ancient stayed jagged—  
thresher blades still beveled as dog teeth,  
scythe toe a hawk beak, rusty,  
but piled with recently-broken blades  
of the bank-owned sickle mower.  
Nothing dulled its edge:  
expecting a boot kick,  
I ground a flathead screwdriver to honed.

## **10 Aphorisms That May Seem Ridiculous to You**

1. Gold flakes on a diamond-powered engine are a thing for sure.
2. Someone I won't like is somebody who busts open the church doors at a grandma funeral and yells, "There's no reason for the truth!"
3. Some people's lives are too sad to not gulp booze.
4. Weed wacking a wedding dress is serious exercise.
5. Not laughing at yourself when you slip on ice is like squandering a \$200 lottery ticket.
6. Someone I will like is someone who brings me a baseball card, tattered from bike spokes, on a silver tray.
7. My voice in the morning sounds like a little book that survived a fire.
8. If you're perpetually sad, it's probably because you're turning into a clown.
9. I hope the most violence I'll ever see again in my life involves a foam club vs. a wiffle ball bat.
10. The only reason I'd ever start smoking is if I ever worked on fishing boat and I kept flicking my butts into the ocean so that the hiss it made when it hit the water would remind me of my job as a cobra wrangler.

## Poem

The day stayed put like thunderclaps in paper bags,  
heavy-tethered and thick-legged, teetering in static,  
dull as standard violence breaking  
like dropped instead of thrown saucers in a fit.  
From a public place, I saw people strewn in the street  
like seeds, fallen into different cracks, mimetic growth—  
dusk light had turned them burning where they reflected.  
From distance they passed like drooping phone wires,  
sinking just to rise at poles. It was at those moments,  
watching a grin's creases then on to the next,  
fleeting, in love with watching the nuance of a face twisting,  
that I too was burning to escape being exactly safe.

## **He Dreams**

of two girls he went to high school with.  
In his dream, both are the same degree  
of pregnant and lonely and they fight over his cock.  
For the next ten minutes, a beam of the rising sun  
grows longer on his snoring dog's body—  
nothing greater than watching something  
impose progress onto something oblivious...  
glowstrip creepreaching toward  
the dog's flopped ear twitching,  
past its ribs trapping billows.  
Now the morning, the day—  
big mess, everything that could stop  
the crush of the body's thousand stomps of progress,  
plodding effortless in skin, disaster by proximity.  
He thinks of last year, how frail he felt  
asking for directions once, nodding his head  
as he watched an approaching car  
pulling into the gas station  
switch its headlights from high beam to low.

### **Snap and Snarl as the Near Best**

A white finger floating from a dark room  
could trace a face, or creaking iron  
coiling against amnesia on the keyboard,  
or the dusted husk of something  
ex-thrashing and ex-blinding.

Along the circumference of round table,  
smooth as half-moon, when staring down,  
feet of people pause the public genesis of idea vigils.  
Out on Maryland Ave., the addicted man's mutt  
takes notice of something.

The doubling opportunities  
of indestructible communication, giving god-balance  
to this kind of frustration...  
snap and snarl as the near best,  
the victor in vengeance by tying knots  
around rivals with their own log chains.  
They were disciples then and went sick  
when their architecture got devoured by unravel.  
Even the sword was crumpled and leaning.  
Everything was pain, everything saying to leave.

### **Enjoy This Penance, Idiot**

The ding-donginess of life  
makes you check the mailbox  
when you come in from dog walking,

knowing for a fact  
that it's too early for it  
to've been delivered.

Chump for doing so.  
And chumpiness manifests itself  
in bogus ho-hum face contorts

to make the neighbors think  
you forgot to check it last night.  
Because your neurotics or whatever

would get them whispering in the hedges.  
The lonesome task sometimes  
of having organs good enough

to thump like they should.  
And why would anyone want  
to walk long in metaphorical fog

so thick with whispers it drenches you?  
So dense the tent poles of gravity  
bend like hot dogs, pavement

you can't see slick as afterbirth  
under the Nikes you can't help think  
are horizon-line thin in the tread.

What you wouldn't give right now  
for the tiny head of a deity  
in your mailbox to tell you,

"Enjoy this penance, idiot.

You don't know how many  
swinging swords you just missed in that fog."

### **Oblong for a Minute**

Noah, to spend the morning thinking of superheroes,  
first cousins, fucking.  
Think of it, Noah: their strong-bodied child,  
topnotch abomination too cozy with its brawn,  
making military go knock-kneed at thought of tantrum.

But some things can only be invented, Noah,  
thought of and sought out  
to make the black rectangle of your civilized brain  
melt to at least oblong for a minute.  
And sippy sippy goes every morning's colding coffee, Noah.  
And on on goes every day's pants, Noah.

If your brain was somehow here, Noah,  
on this salt-and-pepper-shakered oak table,  
you should slap it like a slab of green Jell-O.  
Because in your brain, Noah, in all of ours:  
winnowing teeth with gears dulling past honed.

## **Ladder Dancing**

Let there be no weeping  
when the point's arrived at  
when you're blonde-wigging  
a step ladder and slow dancing,  
curtains open, fine-dressed in pressed trousers,  
to just the normal rhythm of everything  
in the morning street slinking past  
the muffling couches of a living room  
to ears with their teeth loosed  
and ground down but chomping at sound.  
And the audience, just passing neighbors  
and the acrylic God, 2-D on found canvas from the alley,  
double-chinned and a touch too human,  
thumb-tacked by pot pounds  
to the east wall closest to the Atlantic.



**Romantic Movie Plots I'd Like Us to Star In (on another theme by Mark Leidner)**

1. I'm a soft-hearted snow blower and you're a giant snowflake.
2. We're on a jet ski together and I reach my hand out to stop a goose from hitting you in the face.
3. I get my hand caught in a soda machine and you keep putting dollars in until the machine ejects my hand.
4. You're my hair stylist and you finally tell me to quit coming for haircuts because I'm wasting money due to my baldness. I keep coming anyway.
5. I'm afraid to fly and you're a hypnotist who convinces me the Boeing we're getting on is a 1998 Toyota Corolla.
6. You have a peanut allergy and my name is Skippy Jif.
7. I have a birthmark on my left shoulder that looks like a cloud and you have a birthmark on your right that looks like a lightning bolt.
8. You can never remember what incandescent means and I always whisper, "It's what you are."
9. I'm a simple farmer and you like how I ride an ox into town to pay my cell phone bill.

## **Tears That Glistened Different at That Altitude**

Somewhere over the Atlantic on a red eye, I read an article from a magazine that another passenger had left behind. From Sep. 23, 1992 to Apr. 9, 2004, this man would wake every morning and flip open the notebook on his nightstand labeled *Dream Stuff* and find that sometime in the middle of the night (he could never remember doing it) the only entry he'd made was "don't hate the Chinese". Thousands of times that entry was there in different shades of ink and he didn't know why he'd wake from a dream and write that. Then, the article said, he just quit dreaming. It was the saddest thing I'd ever heard and I started crying these tears that glistened different at that altitude but I was the only one in first class and the other 16 passengers were at the back of the plane so nobody noticed until the flight attendant came around to ask me if I wanted another Diet Coke. I looked out the window toward Greenland to hide my face while I told her I did. She was a blonde Texan and I told her why I was crying and she said something like, "Don't be a pussy, y'all." I didn't mind the part about her calling me a pussy, I was just wondering why she said "y'all" since I was the only one in first class. "Y'all is singular in Texas," she said. I told her I thought she was wrong, explaining that at a minimum there would've had to have been at least two people sobbing in their seats looking at Greenland and pussy would've needed to have been pluralized and the indefinite article would need dropping as well. She told me that I had no idea what I was talking about. "I'm from motherfucking Lubbock, y'all," she said. I said "Quit it, you don't know what you're doing by calling me that." "Are you threatening me, y'all?" she said. "No, goddamn woman, I'm just trying to correct an unbelievable error on your part. How have you gone your whole life like this?" I said. "You're a beautiful woman and I bet you were a beautiful child, but you're not so beautiful that you're above correction. How have you gone your whole life like this?" I repeated louder this time as she walked away toward the back of the plane. *How do planes fly?* I scribbled on the napkin she gave me with the Diet Coke. *Horsepower!* I wrote, replacing the exclamation mark with a lightning bolt.

### **All Day in Public Places**

My opera will be about this man  
who wakes up from some cryogenic nap  
about two centuries out of his own  
and is disappointed because of the globe's  
temperature having dropped 5 degrees,  
the only significant evolutionary leap  
that's been made is an over-abundance in women's arm hair.

Or maybe it'll be about another man,  
lonely, who sits all day in public places  
waiting for people to approach him to talk  
and to combat loneliness he starts thinking  
about chemistry and accidentally thinks up  
a formula to make perfume  
without having to pulverize a thousand flowers.

Or about water that has a conscience  
and when it shoots out of the broken dam,  
it uses the deer path encircling the sleeping logging town  
as a spine and it undulates on its back,  
simple as a dropped hula hoop, destroying two miles  
of grove on the outer loop of the path  
while everyone stays asleep inside it  
until all the town's dogs start barking  
at the cracking of giant trees.

Or about this young woman who has forgotten how to hate  
but tries to remember so her husband locks her  
in this giant room full of her favorite things  
and they grow old together like that,  
him sobbing the pure prose of what he did all day

through the door until he falls asleep  
mid-sentence on a bed pulled into the hallway.

### **There are Serious Consequences to Being in the Midst**

It is better to be a finger than a whole body. I am happy to be a finger. Whole bodies deal with things like wanting to be transvestites. The finger of a transvestite could look like the finger of a stock broker. The body of the transvestite (no matter the profession), though, could not look like the body of a stockbroker. There are serious consequences to being as complete as a loaf of bread untwisty-tied. I, as finger to the transvestite, am one of ten that deals with minor things like door handles, itching, button pushing, rubbing the barely-elevated skin of a tattoo, etc. This is the part of the poem where I should do something with language to prove it's a poem instead of something as insignificant/ridiculous as a transvestite's finger. Think of the metaphor: the finger of a full-bodied transvestite. What does that mean? Does it mean the same for you as it does for others? Am I, the writer of this poem, willing to just leave it as it is? A poem simply about the finger of the transvestite. Can I put aside all my training and education and just leave it as it is? Can I sit here at this table in this coffee shop I come to every day and just admit to myself that 45 minutes ago I watched two transvestites sit and eat pastries and I pitied them and I felt guilty about that and then I simply looked at my own fingers and back to theirs to try to find some sort of commonality and I did find a knuckle-haired brotherhood with the two men in blouses and this was a fuck-you world, and a fuck-me-for-pitying-them poem for them, by me.

### **Brass Head**

There are so many things around me that flash:  
red-light blink, blue-dot blink.  
I'd like to put my head inside  
one of those old brass diver's helmets,  
spray paint the see-hole gun-metal gray  
and wander the streets,  
my new ding-ting head banging light poles,  
corners of brownstones,  
an anachronistic tone like a triangle being clanged for supper  
sharp-splicing the modern air when I fall face first  
into things like truck bumpers.  
I dream of my public head covered,  
of my head teetering like plates  
at the top of a plate spinner's pole  
when I go for a blind jog through a state park.  
But what about babies and dogs?  
If I fell into one of them with my brass-covered head?  
And blowing kisses? The gesture could still be recognized.  
My arm bent like a boomerang, hand stretched out  
and instead of soft-patting the lips  
then sending the kiss out,  
just dab a little where a mouth should be.

### **He Drives North out of Baltimore**

He drives north out of Baltimore  
into the antithetical agriculture of northern Maryland.  
Static from one of the city's radio stations  
losing signal and hot coffee from a thermos on the way.  
In these hills loaded with decrepit farm houses,  
with rusted and abandoned farm machinery  
sitting askew in ditches of tall grass  
dying in standing water, the fist unclenches  
and lets a handful of gravel fall through fingers.  
Here, he thinks of his jackhammering heart,  
unattended, falling into a stack of pillows;  
heart, he says, you push and pound  
and take more red-grabs for your steady-mad thumping,  
until I, the tattered case of your tenacity,  
am vibrated loose of my cranked-down rivets.  
Rest for the heart here in the green-hilled purgatory of growth.  
All talk ends here he thinks,  
a martyr turning rubble into ransom.

**Someday I Will Put Thick Wool Socks Over My Red Wings Which Seem to Slap  
the Ground Harder Than They Should**

And I will soft-pad down St. Paul  
or Charles sidewalks and the soft-pad  
will come to murder the boring,  
pejorative boot step too normal the ear;  
those about-to slaps that stopped  
great and garbled thought in mid-step  
would die tight, berries frost-covered on the crunchy vine.  
Thick wool socks to mute!

A man, a woman, must walk to think, think to walk.  
I doubt the brain of God with all this hum he's made.  
The small dangling things in the air,  
paved over with static,  
tings turn to chimes when listened to,  
too unconventional to ignore.  
Thick socks negating the slap of boot,  
the slap of city, great bubble of Baltimore:  
I want you dawn-quiet at busy noon.

### **Baltimore Blue Day**

Another day of sipping coffee,  
Baltimore blue day and its trickling underbelly,  
pipe break fixed by taciturn men  
now packing the hole they cut with hot bitumen.  
How unresponsive the day's become,  
murk-stalled in the rain,  
a whole cache of thinking,  
static, growing floppy as batwings.  
Today, a dull scythe divides the day,  
swath precise, this moment's asymmetry  
fusing with the next's,  
the brawn of day being roused just to rust.



## **Old Injuries**

It is painful to chop me up.  
My old arm-creak grinding  
bits of bones, crunching like  
plier-pulled molars under  
stomping boots—God's hunting  
me and I don't listen closely,  
too afraid to count the atoms  
reducing during atomization; I  
can't count today. I stare down  
the street to the man-made monument  
and it looks like a dick.  
I look into the spilt coffee and  
milk, pooled on the public table  
I sit at, my flaws comingling  
to one big flaw, a flaw rubbing  
its ancient layers gone, so gone  
it's pink again. Fresh again, shaking  
its pink-moist flesh dry but  
it can't be heard, its unhearable  
flapping, but I know it's flapping  
because I've heard that action in  
other things flapping, the sizzle  
of wind through trees.

My hideousness is better than yours.  
Mine's the skin-temple warning  
of man-design promoting the  
uniqueness of will. It startles me,

the first clink of the engineer's chisel,  
chipping things away to make better  
buoyancy, to ascend the ground,  
hating death, spitting from an ether  
wondering if the dust can taste.

### **Window Table**

The window table is hot enough to make you roll sleeves up.  
Traffic outside moves. A mustache's been penned onto a corrupt  
local politician's photo on the front page of the *Sun*,—  
that's been left, unfolded two tables over— his grin hanging,  
life-stalled on his face and heavy as an elephant.

The murmur in here stays dispute-free  
and evolves easy between topics of the citizenry.

Outside on the corner of Franklin and Charles, a man unsheathes his wings  
from under a zipped-up sweatshirt to give directions—  
both wings now arced over his head like a scorpion's tail  
and following his motioning hand  
while two white feathers of his, loosed and fluttering,  
get caught in the tangled hair of a nodding woman.

### **Putting the Weather Inside Marbles**

“Of course, each downdraft’s different, so that’s why I chase the storm. If one wants to encase a sliver of a real vicious thunderstorm in a marble, one needs to be on-site, fist fighting the pressure drop.” I was amazing. The audience I was lecturing sat transfixed on every one of my utterances, most of the women thought me some kind of messiah and I knew I could’ve bedded 3 or 4 of them in the parking lot afterward, but I couldn’t keep from thinking I was a complete charlatan. It wasn’t that I was actually capturing bits of thunderstorms inside of marbles. Rather, I’d invented miniature weather patterns and with a familial history in marble making, the progression was logical. But the lie got away from me. How much more exciting I would seem if I was rambling across a Kansas wheat field,—ungoldened by a glaze of sick-green from the stacking wall cloud overhead—half-globes of a split and hollowed-out marble pinched between both hands’ pointer fingers and thumbs. Launching my gyro-copter out of the back of a hail-pocked pickup after wiping my goggles clear of rain just to cast myself into that crazy vortex, all those crimped isobars and the Doppler-coded red-pink the folks of The Plains States innately flee from. Oh, Betty: my scientific prowess just wouldn’t have been enough to overcome your proclivity for dangerous men. And how you would’ve mocked me if you’d seen me putting invented chaos into tiny orbs of glass. My tiny bow-echo, its straight-line winds, pushing across the lab’s counter top simple as a bat sigh with not even enough huff to topple the construction-paper cathedrals I’d built for you.

### **My Chest of Toys to be Divided Among My Enemies**

After my violent death, they found a pedal of my unicycle stuck firm in the crotch of an elm sapling. Most of my upper torso was no more but they did find my squatty legs stuck inside my thick-canvas dungarees, each one like a hairy index finger in one end of Chinese handcuffs. A paramedic pulled the flask from my gut-flecked back pocket as two other paramedics lifted me onto a gurney. He unscrewed the cap, took a pull and yelled, "I knew it! Bourbon! I guess he's really half in the bag now!" as they all chuckled, put my de-booted bottom torso into a black body bag. Their laughter froze my soul inside of my cloud which produced one giant hail stone (cantaloupe-sized) that, with my new powers, I directed to fall directly onto the smart-assed paramedic's beloved beagle, tethered to a stake in the ground and barking softly inside a rectangle of light coming from the kitchen window that a young, sad wife stood at, mechanically peeling carrots for the night's stew, a fleshy confetti of orange falling quiet into the just-scoured sink.

### **Scene**

A dog on a leash swims like a bull shark  
through the sheen of the loud street. A city  
block, city-put trees here, city-put lightposts  
there, spasms under weight of things drooling  
fumes to move. A flaw of my ear, a flaw of  
my eye, both finally lean perfect into sensory apathy:  
thin-cared, thin-passioned, just a sliver of care.

Maybe this is nature now. Years ago I aimed  
at heavens but settled for dirt and now I sit  
a few stories higher, out-of-season heat,  
watching man and woman, content on a  
shaded stoop, framed by border of rowhouse  
door, under two gables losing their shingles,  
passing a bottle of water back and forth,  
staring across the street into something  
maybe mystical, maybe just the evolving  
shadows of their gables rubbing the rotting  
wood of my east-facing window sill.

### **Haircut at the End of a Day**

I weigh two hundred and six pounds  
after a breakfast of sausage, eggs,  
and pancakes. And in between the  
building's door slams, the seemingly  
intentional clappings up the common  
stairs outside my apartment door this  
morning, I bend the edge of day and it  
slips by where it's bowed most, unseen  
under the diversions of faucet drips  
from the kitchen sink and cat leaps  
in and out of the living room window's  
torn screen. It is night, then, and I walk  
the floor barefoot in a pocket-ripped  
hooded sweatshirt looking for an extension  
cord for the clippers to cut my hair blindly  
away from the bathroom mirror, and feel  
the day under my bare feet, sticking to the  
kitchen's bubbled linoleum, pinch off its  
trickling moments, grow deadlocked  
inside the cheaply built walls of this applied  
bastion. I'm standing on coiled orange cord  
in the small kitchen, gliding blind the  
clippers over my head tilted at the floor,  
cutting my hair just to change.

### **Memory of Staring at a Puddle While Things Moved Around Me**

An illogical alley cut through beveled levels  
of beige lawns, through ours too; puddle water  
reflecting stained glass shook hues of reds  
and blues into a plop-changed lather of sliding  
pinks when drops would hit—dealing with  
Law again: similar similar. Worn, worn out,  
still wearing as the year burned down the earth  
I stomped. My town and its yearly onset  
of thumping rural commerce, which my family abandoned  
for factories, surrounded the small house on Main.

Everything was animated—kids let out of  
Our Lady of Good Counsel at 3:15 put  
shrieks into the teary air; the richer farmers  
with newish pickups parked them slanted in  
front of Kelly's Sunrise, drank their beers  
from draw glasses on the sidewalk outside  
under cover of the Old Bank's awning; layers  
of ground melted and dead leaves now there  
got stacked to up-pointing arrows that were  
blunted by gusts and what was left dried, got set  
on fire and monitored from kitchen windows.  
Everything seemed wet but everything could still burn.

### **He Reclines**

At least less rundown than some of the blocks  
in West Baltimore that prick against the speckling  
of development around Druid Hill.  
He sits in a chair, taking the shape of the chair,  
thinking of a woman a decade younger than him.  
Today the heat of the sun was stopped by breeze  
or the shade of the trees that sizzled  
when wind pushed through their leaves—  
at the edge of moralizing, heat doesn't exist this afternoon,  
but something's burning enough to point the box fan  
at him reclining. A single sheet of paper  
on the mail-strewn coffee table,  
trapped under a heavy set of keys,  
keeps crackling back to flat  
as the fan makes air to bend it.  
He is still young enough to be a threat  
and he sits until the room turns flickering blue  
from the TV in the early evening: his skin is blue,  
ready to move to the alternate of himself in lamp light,  
he stays thoughtdrunk in a stationary pose.



### **A Sunday Morning Watching the Brunch Crowd**

A few visible ghosts among the living  
at public tables here, me too,  
and loneliness is somewhere you can go.  
People you know that aren't here become exotic—  
from here they don't unpack groceries,  
spit when they talk. My ghost is sitting,  
drinking his coffee at a small round table,  
mist-souled and ignored, turning bits  
of glance-eyed cognizance into boulders.  
But here, now, the other ghosts are becoming  
bodies, drumming fingers on their tables,  
talking on phones, putting vocabularies into  
the piped-in cold air that, near the ceiling,  
meet another's at fidgety angles,  
each swinging loose on a mutual vertex,  
spark-thrown when they swoop low  
under the flash-plane they made,  
clobbering each other suddenly in the  
placid blues of the inhabited room.

### **Parallel Iowa**

Between the rivers Mississippi and Missouri, God has forsaken the land. Not because of evil run rampant, but because the dirt's been trampled so fine even He can't stop it from sifting through His backhoe-sized cupped hands. It's always the Spanish Civil War and everyone's an ambulance driver going to pick up a load of the wounded and de-limbed but shots fired are only hearsay. The women invented fucking and bite their lower lips until they bleed prolonging orgasm. And when they've climaxed finally, they always ask the men if they may be gay. A surgeon kicks a black garbage sack of organs because when his bare feet makes first contact with the sack, it behaves like the squishy rubber balls of his youth spent kickballing. The threat of someone flicking your ear is palpable. And when you feel them sneaking up on you and turn to face the motherfucker, it's you in yesterday's clothes and you're faking a yawn like you had no intention of flicking your own ear. The most beautiful aria is coming from your yawn and it makes a little flick of the ear ok suddenly. But when you go to hug yesterday you for creating such music, you fall through yourself and start stalking up on you, flicker ready behind the oblivious body in wardrobe you think perfect for tomorrow.

### **Muffled Goose Honk**

Some of us may find happiness  
in the way a deer's found ribcage in a grove  
leans perfect into bark,  
but some find it overhearing an argument  
over a parking ticket between platypus and crowbar.  
Because a god wanted us to keep achieving a working bliss,  
it let us stack mosquitoes on a scale, one at a time,  
until we got to a pound.

Another season of trying has made it itchy  
under this hat, started chemical fire under pant leg,  
then spat in the river and hustled to the gulf  
to wait for its original loogie,  
the delta spit heavy and black with someone else's dirt.  
But trying got bored of trying  
to muffle a thing like a goose honk echo off of brownstone,  
so we're allowed to dogsled across a tundra  
we thought we found, but the dogs  
keep stubbing their paws on giant s-hooks  
stuck in the freeze, on TV tubes, stopping momentum  
to eat dropped Snickers.  
But wasn't that our inner-chatter worsening,  
real slash marks from wrestling the kitty,

bruised tickles that grew wings and turned to doves,  
went high to notice a drunk moon stuck rippling in a puddle?